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President-Elect Bush on Leaks

In a speech in New Hampshire on 14 March 1987, Vice President Bush referred to the damage done to the national security by leaks of classified intelligence information. Indicating that the quickest way to kill a covert action or any kind of secret activity is through a leak, he noted that leaks have cost us greatly in human sources and intelligence collection mechanisms. He observed that some of our allies are so convinced of our inability to keep secrets that they no longer provide us with high-quality and timely intelligence. He stated "The leaks come from the Congressional committees and from the Executive Branch itself. I believe a Joint Committee on Intelligence should be established to reduce the number of people who have access to very secret information. And I also believe the Administration needs to make some examples of leakers in our own ranks by publicly firing them. And I don't care how high up they are. I don't believe in the wholesale use of the polygraph, but when national security matters are at stake, I say, 'Use it.' "

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AWARENESS

From "Bush Is Said To Be Upset by News Leaks," by Gerald M. Boyd in The New York Times, 18 December 1988.

"President-elect Bush, hoping to set a tone for his administration, is determined to use public expressions of outrage and private threats of reprisals to battle leaks to journalists, senior aides said today.

"While acknowledging that such measures have failed in other administrations, they said Mr. Bush is adamant about curbing unauthorized disclosures and has made that clear to his senior aides.

"... Mr. Bush said leaks reflect a lack of discipline that could ultimately lead to problems such as the disclosure of sensitive national security information.

"... Mr. Bush attempted to prevent unauthorized disclosures of personnel choices for his administration by requiring all officials working on his transition staff to sign a one-page 'standard of conduct.' Included is a paragraph that warns officials against disclosing information that comes to their attention from working on the transition.

"... Mr. Bush has long made it clear to aides that he detests unauthorized disclosures, but the concern reflected his belief that it was not his role as Vice President to articulate policy, and that doing so, in fact, weakened his office. The issue has taken on other dimensions now that he has been elected President.

"... As a former Director of Central Intelligence, he is adamant against the disclosure of information that he regards as threatening the national security. [Mr. Bush's former press spokesman Peter] Teeley recalled how, early in the Reagan Administration, Mr Bush had sat around a table with aides, shaking his head and wondering aloud how an official could have released such information."



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THE NEW YORK TIMES

18 December 1988

Bush Is Said to Be Upset by News Leaks

By GERALD M. BOYD

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Dec. 17 — President-elect Bush, hoping to set a tone for his administration, is determined to use public expressions of outrage and private threats of reprisals to battle leaks to journalists, senior aides said today.

While acknowledging that such measures have failed in other administrations, they said Mr. Bush is adamant about curbing unauthorized disclosures and has made that clear to his senior aides.

Expressing his thinking to one such aide today, Mr. Bush said, "It's like cheating in school."

Mr. Bush said leaks reflect a lack of discipline that could ultimately lead to problems such as the disclosure of sensitive national security information.

Cabinet Rumors Upsetting

The sharp tone became clear this week when Mr. Bush said he became "semi-ballistic" over a report in The Washington Post that he was considering naming two black officials to his Cabinet. Aides said that he has been repeatedly upset by such reports of likely Cabinet choices in recent weeks, and was most upset by the revelation last August that he was considering Senator Dan Quayle of Indiana as his running mate.

"He feels he was elected to make final decisions about personnel, and until he had made them he doesn't feel people should be discussing them in the paper," said a spokeswoman, Sheila Tate. "That seems entirely reasonable."

Peter Teeley, a former press spokesman for Mr. Bush, said in a similar vein: "There is one thing that you have to remember about Bush. He's a person you can trust without question. He's only expecting from others what he would return to them."

Yet some of the players in the Washington game of leaks believe that no President can stop the flow entirely. The practice of making information available unofficially is a way that Government figures curry favor and promote their own agendas. In addition, all Presidents, including Mr. Bush, have made "authorized leaks" to promote their own policies.

Reagan Was Irritated

President Reagan has constantly voiced similar complaints from his first days in office eight years ago. One former aide recalled how he had complained a "blue streak" his first week in office about stories that detailed some of his budget decisions.

Edward Rollins, another former senior White House official in the Reagan Administration, said he believed that Mr. Bush has grown unyielding on the subject after serving as Vice President

Mr. Bush attempted to prevent unauthorized disclosures of personnel choices for his administration by requiring all officials working on his transition staff to sign a one-page "standard of conduct." Included is a paragraph that warns officials against disclosing information that comes to their attention from working on the transition.

"What it is geared at is preventing them from using inside information gained through their work on the transition in some way that might be illegal," said C. Boyden Gray, the transition counsel. "It also covers unauthorized leaks."

A Chilling Effect

Mr. Gray said Mr. Bush's transition is the first to impose such an order on officials. But pointing out the difficulty in enforcing it, he said, "How can you accuse someone of leaking something that might not be true or that is a figment of their imagination?"

Yet aides to Mr. Bush have become extremely sensitive to even the appearance of leaks. When some Bush aides close to Gov. John H. Sununu of New

Hampshire, Mr. Bush's choice to be chief of staff, learned Friday that a story was to appear today disclosing some choices for other White House positions, they decided to issue a press release to make sure the story would not appear as a leak.

Disclosures are likened to 'cheating in school.'

"Is there a chilling effect?" said one Bush aide. "Of course there is."

Mr. Bush has long made it clear to aides that he detests unauthorized disclosures, but the concern reflected his belief that it was not his role as Vice President to articulate policy, and that doing so, in fact, weakened his office. The issue has taken on other dimensions now that he has been elected President.

A Washington Tradition

For example, aides have begun debating such questions as what constitutes loyalty and to what extent they are really harming Mr. Bush by providing hints of decisions that he is about to announce anyway. There are also discussions on how serious a problem such disclosures are, since Government officials have long leaked information.

The disclosure that Mr. Bush was

aides that he resented the disclosure, one said. The prospective appointees are Louis Sullivan, president of Morehouse School of Medicine, and Julius W. Becton Jr., a retired Army general who heads the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Actually, the same information had been provided earlier at a news conference by Craig L. Fuller, the transition's co-director. Asked if Mr. Bush was having difficulty finding qualified black officials to serve in the Cabinet, Mr. Fuller said:

"We are not having difficulty finding qualified black candidates for these positions, and we've got, we are evaluating and looking at more than one, or two, in fact."

Concern for Others Seen

Alixé Gleñ, another spokeswoman for Mr. Bush, said that particular issue was particularly upsetting to Mr. Bush, because no final decision had been made.

"The basic fact of this goes to the basic goodness of George Bush, who doesn't like to see people hurt by these leaks," she said. "Inevitably, that is going to happen because somebody might be under consideration on Wednesday, will not be on Thursday. He can be humiliated by that."

Mr. Bush has sought to prevent the disclosure of other choices by keeping most of his aides in the dark. In fact, even such officials as press spokesmen and speech writers, who draft his comments announcing the selections, are not told until the last minute.

Longtime Bush aides and advisers say there are certain kinds of leaks that concern Mr. Bush more than others. For example, he has long resented reports that suggest staff disharmony, such as those last fall in which some senior aides reportedly questioned the wisdom of having Senator Quayle as a running mate and asserted that he was being relegated to a minor role in the campaign.

Days at C.I.A. Recalled

In addition, as a former Director of Central Intelligence, he is adamant against the disclosure of information that he regards as threatening the national security. Mr. Teeley recalled how, early in the Reagan Administration, Mr. Bush had sat around a table with aides, shaking his head and wondering aloud how an official could have released such information.

Aides say that Mr. Bush is hoping to limit such breeches by making disclosures himself through regular sessions with the media. Even so, the problem is not likely to go away.

"I don't think he can ever shut it down totally," Mr. Rollins said. "From time to time, he can only slow it down a bit."

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